

# hearing protection

## Protect Your Hearing

If you are getting used to being in a noisy workplace, chances are you are destroying your hearing. Becoming accustomed to loud noise is a sign you are suffering a hearing loss.

The unfortunate thing about losing your hearing is that the condition is irreversible. Loud noise permanently damages the sensitive inner ear. You could be wearing a hearing aid before you know it.

To give you an idea of how loud noise can affect your hearing, a regular conversation measures around 60 decibels, which is how sound is measured. A drill might register at twice this, causing actual pain to ears.

You may not realize your hearing loss because the process happens subtly, depending on the loudness and duration of the noise as well as your exposure to it. You may not be aware until it's too late.

Hearing loss may be starting to set in when you notice that sounds start to seem muffled, or you experience ringing in your ears.

You can measure whether or not you are experiencing hearing loss by getting annual hearing tests, often provided by an employer. You're probably familiar with the audiometer, the device used for this. You wear headphones and identify the volume and pitch of tones.

The most obvious method to reduce workplace hearing loss is to remove or reduce noise. Locations with hazardous noise levels can be identified with sound surveys.

Noise can be reduced by altering machinery and placing noise limit specifications on new equipment. Other aids include enclosures which muffle equipment sound or protect employees from excess noise.

Even with such precautions, you should wear hearing protection devices at all times.

- Ear plugs are inserted into the ears and can be made of disposable foam, reusable plastic, or are mounted on a headpiece or a cord.

- Formable foam plugs expand in the ear to provide a custom fit. Keep them clean and throw them away if they harden or do not expand.

- Premolded plugs fit the ear and come in a variety of sizes. Usually attached to a cord, these kinds of plugs generally last several months but should be kept clean and replaced if damaged.

- Ear muffs are filled with liquid or foam, and have hard cups with soft, plastic cushions sealing around the ears. They generally provide the most sound protection.

The kind of ear protection you wear will depend on the kind of job you have and the kind of noise you are exposed to. A professional will help you choose the right kind.

*Protecting your hearing is not hard to do whether you wear protective devices or reduce noise levels in the workplace. Just make sure you take the proper steps...or the next thing you hear may be nothing at all!*

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